

Visit Report

Date: October 1 - 2, 1973

Location: Villa Royal Motel
Raleigh, North Carolina

Visit By: J.F. Cole

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Subject: EPA-NIEHS Conference on Low Level Lead Toxicity

The program for this Conference was put together by Dr. Robert Goyer of the University of North Carolina who is soon to join the full-time staff of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). In view of the very short lead time provided to Dr. Goyer for the arrangement of this Conference, it should be stated that the program was of very high caliber and the arrangements were quite good.

Papers were presented by a number of individuals with primary emphasis placed on the behavioral effects of low-level lead exposure and also the lead in dust theory of pediatric lead poisoning. There were a number of other papers which dealt with the behavioral effects of lead in animals. However, these were invariably produced by extremely high concentrations of lead and it was questioned legitimately, I think, as to whether or not these papers really belonged in a Conference on Low-Level Lead Toxicity. A summarization of the Conference would have to state that the positions of the lead industry regarding the speculative nature of the EPA's lead in dust theory was borne out. Papers presented by Gary TerHaar of Ethyl Corporation, Clifford Strehlow of St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, and Jereslav Vostal of the University of Rochester all indicated that 1) lead in dust is not a significant contributor to the overall intake of lead and 2) that source of lead in house dust is the chalking or dusting of old leaded paints. To be sure, there were those who challenged the findings of these papers. Among those were Dr. Samuel Epstein and several EPA personnel, including Dr. Kenneth Bridbord. Dr. Oliver David presented his findings on the association between low-level lead concentrations in the body and hyperactivity in children. He has not carried out further experimentation beyond his original publication which appeared in the Lancet, in 1972. Dr. David's paper has spawned other researchers to do animal work which would tend to support his theory that lead may be associated with hyperactivity. However, the dosages fed to the animals were so large that toxicity was certain to result.

Another important paper was that by Dr. George Wetherill of UCLA who has used the stable lead isotope technique to determinate model absorption and distribution in the human body. Dr. Wetherill's findings tend to support the views of the EPA who hold that lead from the atmosphere contributes significantly to the lead content of blood. There are a number of assumptions in Dr. Wetherill's work, however, which need clarification before his views can be entirely accepted. It was certain, however, that his findings were of importance and also the quality of his work was generally accepted as good among the scientific group attending the Conference.

It must be said, however, that overall, the EPA did not come off nearly so well as they had probably anticipated when this Conference was set up. We had thought that the Conference was slanted in such a way that support for EPA's position would inevitably result. This did not turn out to be the case and it must be concluded that overall, the Conference proved to be a benefit to the lead industry, since so many of the papers corroborated our point of view.

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